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AUTHOR Hoover, Maya Frieman; Frieman, Barry B.
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the mentoring relationship between preservice and practicing teachers, noting the importance of using a formal agreement to enhance the process. This agreement helps avoid the problem of conflicting expectations between the two parties. Information for the paper comes from case studies derived from mentoring student teachers and music education students and from interviews with mentees. The paper includes a list of 12 proactive behaviors for mentors to follow and a list of 12 behaviors for mentees. The proposed 12 points spell out the obligations and responsibilities of each party. These behaviors are in the areas of respect and trust, power, boundaries, and professionalism. The paper suggests that using such a mentoring agreement will help both student and professor enter the mentoring experience with realistic expectations. (Contains 12 references.) (SM)

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USING A FORMAL AGREEMENT TO ENHANCE THE MENTORING PROCESS: A PERSCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS

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Maya Frieman Hoover, Indiana University

Barry B Frieman, Towson University

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Mentoring can be defined as a relationship between two people in which one offers support, guidance, and assistance to the other who is a learner in the senior person's field. It can be used to describe the relationship between professor and student. The use of a formal agreement can facilitate a healthy mentoring process by clarifying expectations at the onset of the process for both the mentor and the mentee. Without an agreement, mentors and mentees often have conflicting expectations of each other.

The authors have participated in the mentoring process over the years as both mentors and mentees in the disciplines of education and music. The authors will draw from case studies derived from mentoring student teachers and music education students. Interviews with mentees will also be used.

The mentor is not only responsible for the individual development of the student in their field of study, but he/she also serves as "gate-keeper." The mentor is responsible for assuring that the student is competent to enter the profession with the necessary tools to guarantee success and enhance the reputation of the university.

Mentoring has been used with new faculty members at universities (Boice,1992; Van Ast, 1995) and in public schools (DeBolt, 1991; Odell, S, 1992; Bainer and Didham, 1994.) Program directors have also claimed varying degrees of success in

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students (Cave and Quint, 1990). Other researchers have explored the attributes of a good mentor (Dujari, 2001).

Students often view mentors or professors as the ultimate authorities .A traditional view of the mentor as absolute authority is found in the comments of a former football player at a major university who described his mentor/coach. After noting that his coach punched him so severely that blood poured from his mouth, the player went on to say, "I have a lot of respect for Coach M. He was a great coach. He was very tough on his players, very disciplined, very strict, and he had coached some great athletes, some great offensive linemen." Stories involving mental abuse were frequently heard from both education and music students.

Mentors often have to give mentees feedback regarding their performance. Barett (2000) pointed out that critiquing a performance or work is a delicate matter. Barett explored the thoughts and feelings of instructors and students when students displayed their art for critical response. Several students reported being emotionally hurt by critiques. One even noted about a professor who "… functions as the almighty one, damning some works and glorifying others as though he or she is God, and this is the word from on high." This traditional view of mentoring seems to ignore the emotional well being of the mentee.

To help achieve a positive mentor-mentee relationship, Campbell and Campbell (2000), suggested that there is a need to address the differing expectations of the mentor and the mentee at the outset of the mentoring relationship. This paper follows up on that recommendation and suggests a Mentoring Agreement that can help facilitate a

psychologically healthy mentor-mentee relationship.

Challenges In The Mentoring Relationship

There are many challenges that have to be met before a successful mentoring relationship can happen. These challenges are in the areas of respect, trust, power, boundaries, and professionalism. If these issues are dealt with in a proactive manner, both mentor and mentee can avoid the common pitfalls that make the mentoring process less than effective.

A list of twelve proactive behaviors has been developed for mentors to follow and another twelve-item list has been developed for mentees. The behaviors noted on the lists spell out the parameters of an effective professor-student mentoring relationship.

Both professors and students need to be clear about their responsibilities involving mentoring. The proposed twelve points spell out the obligations and responsibilities of each party.

Respect and Trust

Professor:
1. I will treat the student with respect.
2. I will criticize only the student's work and never their person.
3. I will trust the student to be a maturing professional.
4. I will trust the student to be serious about the discipline.

Student:
1. I will treat the professor with the respect due a more experienced, professional.
2. I will take all concerns about my professional growth to my professor

before I talk to other people.

3. I will trust that my professor is concerned with my development into a competent professional.
4. I will trust that my professor has the best interests of our profession as his/her concern.

An atmosphere of respect and mutual trust facilitates the mentoring relationship. When a mentor puts the student's needs first, the student develops a feeling of trust with the professor. Once respect and mutual trust are achieved both parties can begin to deliver honest feedback that can be used to improve the student's performance as a developing professional. One senior professor interviewed, Dr. Cloe, discussed her approach:

> I strive during the experience to be supportive and honest with my mentees and let them know that I care about them as people. A good example is my experience supervising Kara during her student teaching experience. As Kara's advisor, I had supported her over some difficult health situations. During these times I had demonstrated that I really valued her as a person. Kara had overcome the consequences of a serious injury that some professionals told her would make it impossible for her to be a teacher of young children.
>
> I told her at the beginning of the experience that I though highly of her potential as a teacher and knew that she would be successful. Once she was in the classroom it was easy to highlight the good things that she had done because there were many. After proving to her that I saw her good qualities, I asked her if she

wanted me to be "picky" and focus on the nuances that could make her a better teacher. Because she trusted me, Kara was able to hear all of the little fine-tune suggestions not as criticisms but as way to help her develop.

Dr. Billings, another elementary education professor interviewed, noted how he dealt with the issue of trust. He noted:

> I strive during the supervision experience to be supportive and honest with my students in a respectful way. I try hard to have the student work to her standards and to meet her goals and not mine. My goal is to have her become the best teacher that she can be, and I trust her to develop her own style of teaching.

When trust and mutual respect are present, the mentoring relationship becomes a true partnership. Both parties are interested in the success of the mentee. Mora, a music student interviewed discussed her relationship with her mentor professor:

> I feel that we have a partnership. She is clearly the expert. We are not equals in terms of our technical singing ability but she made it clear that we are equals as people. The enormous amount of respect she shows me gives me confidence and validates my hard work. Nothing good that I do goes unnoticed, and my faults are corrected in a respectful manner.
>
> My mentor is also considerate of me as a person. She understands that I have a life outside of school, and she respects the choices I make. She is able to understand that my studies are extremely important to me, but that my family is also important to me. My mentor accepts me when I set priorities for my own life.
>
> She supports me as an independent thinker, always telling me that she has

confidence that my views are well thought out, well researched, and expressed in a professional manner. My mentor gives me the confidence to assert my honest opinion by letting me know that she respects my feelings and my views.

Power

Professor: 5. I will use my power as the gate-keeper of the profession fairly.

6.I will let the student develop his/her own style.

7. I will let the student make his/her own decisions and set his/her own priorities.

Student: 5. I will take the responsibility for my own learning and growth.

6. I will deal with the consequences of my decisions.

7. I will recognize my professor's responsibility to push for high standards in my professional performance.

The mentor can have a great deal of power over the mentee and this power must be used wisely. It is the professor's responsibility to insure that anyone who passes out of his/her care is competent in the field. This process can involve confronting students when they are not performing up to standards.

One can misuse the power granted by their position and can use it to exert inappropriate control over their mentees. People who have little control over some aspects of their lives often feel more powerful by exerting control over the life of another person. This power makes them feel important and serves to balance their lack of control in other areas of their personal and/or professional lives.

This distortion can manifest itself in the professor requiring absolute obedience

from the student. The professor's way becomes the only way and any deviation or difference of opinion on the part of the student mentee is not tolerated. Margaret's experience as an elementary education student -teacher illustrates this point. She reported:

> My mentor professor told me that I had to wear purple when she came to visit my classroom and that I had to have a cup of coffee ready for her. I realized after I talked to some of my classmates who had worked with her previously that if I didn't comply with her commands I would be given a poor evaluation. Without a good evaluation my chances of getting a job were really slim.

Margaret's university supervisor focused on an area that was irrelevant to Margaret's classroom performance. This unrealistic demand on the part of the professor eroded the student's confidence in the professor's ability to supervise. As a consequence the student felt that her supervisor was foolish and did not value the comments made about her work in the classroom.

Boundaries

Professor: 8. I will recognize the autonomy of the student in handling her/his family and social life.

9. I will focus on meeting the student's needs and not my own.

10. I will focus on putting my student in the forefront and staying in the background.

Student: 8. I will only ask my mentor for help with professional matters.

9. I will take full responsibility for the consequences of my own life choices.

10. I will set my own career goals based on my own values.

For the mentoring process to be effective, both student and professor must deal with boundary issues in a positive manner. The professor has a responsibility over parts of the students' performance, but has to give the students autonomy over their personal lives, goals, and the methods they choose to achieve their goals.

An unhealthy situation occurs when a professor has the primary focus on either consciously or unconsciously having his/her own needs met. Rachel, a vocal-music student, had a voice teacher who told her that she never achieved the fame that she deserved during her singing because she put too much emphasis on her children. "She thought that I was talented and that I could be the singer that she never was," Rachel said. The mentor "demanded" that the student not "waste" any time with friends or family but spend all of her time devoted to her music. Rachel reported,

> I went along with her for as long as I could. The breaking point came when she told me that even if my mother died I would be expected to not miss my singing performance. That was enough. I went to the department chair and requested another mentor teacher.

Other students reported that they wanted their professors to see them as individuals who have the right to control their own lives outside of their profession. Jason, an education major who was interviewed, reported that:

> My field mentor-teacher wanted to be my mother. She wanted to tell me who (sic) I should date. I just wanted her to help me with my teaching. I already have one mother and I don't need another.

Mentors can be sensitive to the fact that students have lives outside of the university. A good example is how Professor Watson reacted to a student he was supervising in her student-teaching placement. His student was doing very well in her classroom placement. As he was visiting early one morning he noticed that she seemed distracted. He said:

> I asked her if she was feeling well. She said that she was just tired because her grandfather had a stroke the evening before, and she had spent the night in the emergency room with her family. I told her that our personal lives are important, and I asked her colleague to take over so she could go to the hospital to be with her family. She told me that she really wanted to be in the hospital but that she didn't want me to think that she wasn't serious about her professional responsibilities.

This professor recognized that his student had an important life outside of the boundaries of the education profession.

Successful mentors keep the student's best interests constantly in mind. Cindy, a music student interviewed, noted that professors "looked good" if their mentees had roles in the department's opera productions. Cindy reported:

> I wanted to audition for a particular role, and I knew that it would look good for my teacher if I got the part. I was surprised when she told me that she didn't want me to audition for the role because it was in the wrong Fach (vocal category) for me, and that she didn't want me to harm my voice. She really firmed my trust in her to teach me how to develop and take care of my voice.

Jennifer, a chemistry-secondary education student teacher who was interviewed, noted a similar experience with her mentor. She recalled:

> I was in the first week of my experience in the school when a chemistry teacher quit. The principal asked me if I wanted to take over the classroom as a long-term substitute. I know that it would look good for my professor if I took over the class. When my professor was asked by the principal of the school for consent, he declined and told her that I really had to have a supervised experience to make sure that I fulfilled the legal requirements to get my teaching license. He was really concerned about my career.

In both of these situations, the mentor kept the mentee's needs first.

Profession

Professor: 11. I will place mentoring as a high priority responsibility.

12. I will model the highest professional ethics.

Student: 11. I will respond to my professor's constructive comments and work to integrate them into my work.

12. I will learn and apply my profession's code of ethics.

Both mentor and mentee expect themselves and their mentoring partner to be committed to their profession. Professor Chen, an early childhood education professor, explained that he expects students to be serious and committed to becoming teachers. He noted, "I put a lot of time an energy into helping my students perform at their best, and I want them to take their education seriously. I expect them to be prepared when they enter the classroom to teach."

Students have expectations for both themselves and their professors. Sara, an education student reported, "I expect to work hard by taking the information given to me and applying it. I push myself to work just as hard outside of the classroom as I do inside." Marilyn, a music education student interviewed agreed. She said, "I expect myself to learn the techniques taught by my teacher and to use them. I practice daily and continue to work on the things she and I discussed in the studio." Thus, both mentor and mentee should expect and receive a high level of commitment to the learning process.

Summary

Using the Mentoring Agreement will help both student and professor enter the mentoring experience with realistic, healthy expectations. Professors will be able to offer the appropriate support and guidance to help students grow as professionals. Students will prosper by having made a strong commitment to their professional growth and agreeing to learn from constructive feedback.

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